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SYNCRETISM AND SALIENCE IN “THE MAN TO SEND RAINCLOUDS”

Abstract: *This article addresses two important issues concerning Indigenous identity, syncretism and salience. Leslie Silko’s short story, “The Man to Send Rainclouds”, presents significant insight into the issues that syncretism and salience have upon Indigenous perspectives of the world and of themselves. The crucial dynamic of syncretism affecting both salience and identity is examined as well as the ramifications of succumbing to syncretic practices. Syncretism, while offering a sense of accomplishment, ultimately only diminishes both the salience and identity of the Indigenous community.*

Key words: *Leslie Marmon Silko, Native American, indigenous, Laguna Pueblo, syncretism, salience, hybridity, Judaism, Christianity, identity.*

Introduction

For almost all Native American tribes, salience has been an evolving factor with every encounter with ‘others’, whether that encounter was with neighbouring tribes or with colonists. At the heart of salience is identity, which spans both pre-Columbian and post-colonial eras. The worldview that informs a particular focus of what tribal identity comprises will also have parameters for the individual identity within the tribal community. Within that worldview, the religious expressions are also subject to boundaries of tribal identity and historical practice.

When both tribal identity and religious practice encounter and absorb another worldview that defines identity and expresses religious practices differently, a clash must result. The outcome of such a conflict—identity and religious practice—will depend on how much of the other worldview to reject and how much to accept. The clash might ultimately end with the complete rejection of the other worldview, or if there is any acceptance, specifically with regards to religious expression,

syncretism results. Syncretism, specifically the blending of religious practices, is not simply a matter of accommodation but a compromise of worldview that adversely affects one’s salience, which is the quality or fact of being more prominent in a person’s awareness or in his memory of past experience (*The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*, 3210).

Syncretism and its limitations

This clash of worldviews finds itself aptly expressed in contemporary Native American literature. Historically, most tribes embody primarily oral traditions, only recently (considering the history of Native American tribes) has writing shared with a broad audience the battered, yet beautiful cultures of those who preceded colonists. White describes the difficulty associated with the transition to English language dominance for Native American communities in general and to writing in English particularly for Native American authors (90). A particular theme in reading contemporary Native American texts,

such as James Welch's *Winter in the Blood*, M. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*, or Lois Erdrich's *Love Medicine*, demonstrates a struggle between desires to conform to, or resist modern culture while attempting to maintain their identity and traditional societal values. Their writing seemingly bridges the cultural clashes though by blending traditional oral structures within written culture. Working within the dominant culture and language, writing merges thoughts of the old and ideas of the new. The literature, therefore, illustrates the extent to which syncretism has become dominant in modern Native American communities.

Two particular issues that must be addressed concerning syncretism are how the blended religious practices diminish or increase the efficacy of the particular expression, in other words, how well the practice works, and secondly, how the incorporation of the foreign practice influences the original worldview. Both of these issues present metaphysical and philosophical dilemmas. First, concerning efficacy, if the blended practice, say spoken prayer, adds a dimension of formula or invocation of power heretofore unknown, then the efficacy of the new expression is dubitable. This uncertainty rests on the impact of the syncretism on the worldview. The acting ritual blending in and of itself indicates a lack of efficacy of the original religious expressions (otherwise there would be no need for the blending) and therefore engages the need for the syncretic addition to the religious expression.

It is important to see how the worldview of world religions varies with regards to syncretism. Even among Native Americans, there is a vast spectrum of worldviews represented. Common religious themes among many tribes include concepts of a creator, trickster, origin of creation, tribal origin, and an after life. Now whether these aspects can be influenced by syncretism will depend on the tribe and even the indi-

vidual member of the tribe. Judaism and Christianity, both historically and currently, fundamentally reject syncretism as it pertains to rituals and issues of faith. As Moses was summarising the wilderness journey in the last book of the Torah, a warning ensues concerning false prophets,

If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder, and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place, and he says, "Let us follow other gods" (gods you have not known), "and let us worship them", you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The LORD your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul. It is the LORD your God you must follow, and him you must revere. Keep his commands and obey him; serve him and hold fast to him. (Deuteronomy 13:1-4, New International Version-[NIV]).

The message is very clear that even if a 'prophet' comes along with all kinds of words and signs and wonders that come true, but then says to follow after other gods, do not listen to that person. In fact, Moses explains that such a person is a test of their faithfulness to the LORD and he admonishes the Israelites to remain faithful to the LORD. The other part of the test concerns what to do with the false prophet,

That prophet or dreamer must be put to death, because he preached rebellion against the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery; he has tried to turn you from the way the LORD your God commanded you to follow. You must purge the evil from among you. (Deuteronomy 13:5, NIV).

The test is whether or not the prophet is stoned to death for turning the Israelites away from God. What that false prophet has contradicted is the command to all Israel, "Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts" (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). The command demands singularity of devotion.

There are similar warnings against any blending of other peoples' religious ideas or practices throughout the Bible. Syncretism has harsh repercussions, such as the death of the false prophet wanting to take the peoples' hearts away from the Lord, when ultimately, the heart of the Israelites needed to stay faithful to the LORD. When the Israelites do stray and invoke other nations' practices into the temple worship, various messengers proclaim such ritual practices as prostitution. In these passages, those practices are not only compared to physical prostitution, but also spiritual prostitution:

She gave herself as a prostitute to all the elite of the Assyrians and defiled herself with all the idols of everyone she lusted after. (Ezekiel 23:7)

"I will not punish your daughters when they turn to prostitution, nor your daughters-in-law when they commit adultery, because the men themselves consort with harlots and sacrifice with shrine prostitutes— a people without understanding will come to ruin"! (Hosea 4:14)

"Long ago you broke off your yoke and tore off your bonds; you said, 'I will not serve you!' Indeed, on every high hill and under every spreading tree you lay down as a prostitute." (Jeremiah 2:20)

These messengers proclaim that what results from spiritual prostitution is unfaithfulness and as such, the blended worship rituals can never achieve what God had originally instituted, His blessings and His presence.

Such sentiments are not limited to the Old Testament because we find messengers proclaiming the same message. In fact, there is a consistent thread of warning, from Genesis to Revelation, against blending spiritual practices and teachings. In the Book of Revelation, concerning the Church in Pergamum, the Angel issues this warning, "Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by

committing sexual immorality". Here the warning is both against worship practices, sexual practices, and teaching, but in this particular warning, teaching is mentioned twice, "Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans" (Revelation 2:12-15). The Angel also observes the spiritual prostitution in the Church in Thyatira, "Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols." For both of these churches, there is recovery but on the condition that they turn from these practices and remain faithful in their relationship and worship of God. In other words, if they repent of these practices, their reward is blessings from God rather than curses.

Though cultural syncretism is another matter not addressed here (See Zehner 610 or Thomas 398), there is no middle ground of compromise for Judeo-Christian theology that allows religious syncretism a foothold. Greenspahn notes that there has never been a time that blending religious rituals from other nations with the ritual practices and teachings of Judeo-Christian theology have been acceptable (490). Any such compromise is unacceptable, including matters concerning the character of God, who He is or what He requires; faith and how it is expressed; and the nature of humanity. Further, any such compromise usually engenders the label of heresy or spiritual prostitution. While such practices were clearly condemned in both Old and New testaments, certainly they occurred, despite the warnings. But what about syncretism from Judeo-Christian religious practices to Native American practices? The differences in worldview, syncretising Native American ritual practices with Judeo-Christian practices and theology, are important to ponder as well.

Given the vast diversity among Native American tribes, it is still possible to make

some observations concerning the practice of syncretism. Two important issues confront the change resulting in such a syncretic occasion. First of all, if syncretism is practiced, then that indicates a modification in worldview as well. For the particular tribe, or just individuals in the tribe, there seems to be a notion that the Creator in Judeo-Christianity is amenable to such ritual blending, even though the Bible clearly teaches differently. It also assumes that their own Creator is amenable to such blending, and given such an event, that no restrictions on such events seem to exist. There seem to be no warnings against such practices, nor does it seem to be a question of fidelity to the Creator if one were to engage in such practices.

Secondly, the syncretism seems to insinuate that the Creator in the Native American tribe does not have the omnipotence necessary for the efficacy of the blended ritual, and thus the Creator's need to have help arises. The tribal Creator and 'his' attributes must therefore undergo a diminishing of power, knowledge, and impact on the one whose new ritual contains both traditional elements and new ones. What results is a ritual that engenders uncertainty since the character and power of the original Creator needed augmentation to answer this new expression. Questions of efficacy now must abound since this new practice has no historical reference for how to perform it. Thus, the answer to the new ritual, as well as implications about the one who will answer it, remains tentative as the worshipper hopes his or her expression is understood, efficacious, and acceptable to the Creator.

Syncretism and Silko

Leslie Marmon Silko is one of the few significant voices in a recently established renaissance of Native American literature currently blending western written styles with traditional oral storytelling. A Laguna Pueblo, Silko authored critically acclaimed

novels and poetry highlighting the cultural struggle between syncretism and the preservation of established tribal norms. The Laguna Pueblo tribe fought internally over these issues with Silko's biracial family at the centre of tribal controversy. She stated in her autobiography *Storyteller*:

A good deal of controversy surrounded and still surrounds my great-grandfather and his brother who both married Laguna women. Ethnologists blame the Marmon brothers for all kinds of factions and trouble at Laguna and I am sure much of it is true – their arrival was bound to complicate the already complex politics at Laguna. (Silko 256)

Silko's comments on the complex relationship between her relatives, the white culture, and the Laguna Pueblo tribe described the divide in attitudes toward modernisation and protection of customs. It separated the tribe into many different factions, scattering members across the reservation and New Mexico entirely.

Again it is important to make a distinction here about cultural syncretism, or hybridity, and religious syncretism since on one hand, cultural blending, while it affects the issue of identity, it does not have such dire consequences on the religious rituals. Schäfer notes that, "because Native people are the minority in their own country, have lost many of their traditions and languages, and are still living under colonial rule, their cultural identity is shaped by a forced hybridity that they cannot escape" (91). Her contention is that even among the indigenous population, such blending is seen as "impurity" and is actively trying to resist further colonisation. Both this resistance and notion of impurity seem to be exemplified in Silko's biography.

What is evident from Silko's biography is hybridity of cultures, which is a specific cultural phenomenon in Native American life. Her writing exists simply to observe contemporary Indian life through her work. Silko's literature reflects her bi-

racial ancestry as she delves into the social constructs of identity and cultural fusion among Native Americans. Even though the assimilation of western cultural values to Native American societies transforms traditional faiths, customs, and practices by combining opposing beliefs, Martin suggests this is only a slight variation of an ultimate truth expressed differently (280). Syncretism, therefore, currently characterises Native American culture and its uncertain future in western society. The rapid integration of Native Americans into the technological democracy of modern America creates a disjunct among tribes, particularly between older generations and their way of life, and the younger population, alienating one group from the other. Silko's cultural background demonstrates the syncretistic systems Native Americans currently face.

The salience of Silko's work enables discussion of syncretism in Native American societies today. Prior to her first novel, *Ceremony*, very little text defined modern Indian life because of the cultural importance of orality. Instead of maintaining a specific position on syncretism, she depicts present Native American society and reflects the binary struggle of benefits and drawbacks; positive and negative culturally produced results in Native American societal spheres. In discussing syncretism though, the question of identity seemingly raises itself and becomes a pessimistic conversation. In a country littered with museums celebrating the history of everything from music (The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame) to the weird (Ripley's Believe it or Not!), only recently has any national museum established the history and importance of Native Americans (National Museum of the American Indian) for widespread recognition. Native American culture is attempting to move beyond the stereotypical expectations in media, and form a historical identity through museums, but modernity in Indian life remains

resistant to any form of distinction. Realising the cultural trend of syncretism, Silko observes tribal behaviour from a biracial point of view as *Ceremony* portrays the tribal as well as individual identity each side represents in the difficult effort of obtaining a sense of self; something a museum fails to capitalise on and reveal. Silko illuminates society's discriminating attitudes, which alienate those perceived different, as part of a discussion on contemporary Native American society, tying it to the conflict between opposite beliefs, subtly defining syncretism and characterising it as part of daily Indian life.

The racial elements of *Ceremony* begin with a character named Tayo who Silko guides through the story to enable audience understanding of the character's difficulty as a biracial man. Tayo seeks to understand his identity within any part of his cultural background. He is marginalised by white culture as a Native American, and as part Mexican, he is submitted to yet another diminutive status in Native American society. Silko writes, "Mexican eyes... the other kids used to tease me... When they look at me they remember things that happened" (Silko 99). Based solely on his appearance, Tayo is judged by children; through only pure physicality, he is socially rejected. The book reflects Silko's own upbringing and juxtaposes the story into a larger American racial context. It is a blend of two cultures, but the dichotomy of races is crucial for self-identity and tribal affiliations.

Tayo's identity is voided then from straddling a racial line between Mexican and Indian. There is no one true comfortable place for him. His presence and look remind his dominant culture of sexual taboos within the society. Tayo's distinct appearance as a biracial man serves as negative reinforcement of either culture's standards; his sense of identity is lost as he struggles to learn the social attitudes characteristic of each individual ethnicity. His

relationship with both societies becomes strained attempting to fit both cultural labels. This constant back and forth motion requires Tayo to socially outfit himself to a specific culture that is closest at that given time. He must tailor his identity accordingly, not as a requirement for westernised society, but through familial and social necessity concerning Mexican and Native American cultural taboos. Syncretism, in this way, becomes a negative discussion on cultural roles. Which facets of the dominated society require preservation? Does the dominating society have any responsibility upholding the minority culture? These questions reinforce the negativity of syncretism and the problems each culture faces in trying to answer them.

Silko's fiction merely mirrors contemporary Native American society. She never aims to preach or solve every problem facing tribal life; her desire is only to present it for notoriety and communal discussion. In a sense, much of her literature can be seen as a reporter providing information about the story she is reporting. Her Laguna heritage fuses her writing with English prose, yet certainly from a non-mainstream perspective. The identity conflict, specifically in *Ceremony*, offers a glimpse into the reality of Silko's childhood and Indian life entirely. She divulges the emotional elements of living in Laguna Pueblo society as a racially and culturally mixed woman from a prominent family.

Silko's family influenced her writing and originally created a large amount of conflict within the tribe. Since the Marmon brothers, Anglo-Americans Walter and Robert, arrived from Ohio in the 1870's, the appearance and form of the Laguna Pueblo tribe perpetually changed, blending White and Native American cultures. And the marginalisation of her family was evident; the family occupied a house situated apart from the rest of the village, positioned on the borders of Anglo-American and Native American societ-

ies and cultural mores. She commented on this experience declaring, "I always thought there was something symbolic in that – we're on the fringe of things" (Tillet). Her experience enabled writing on a topic previously unseen by members of either civilisation.

Anglo-American culture equally acknowledged Silko's family as outsiders. In her collection of essays, *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit*, Silko notes an incident of exclusion by Anglo-American tourists from a photograph of the other Pueblo children. She wrote, "I was aware that I was different", in reference to her omission (Silko 176). Her clash with culture created the angst typical for a writer whose reflections establish important work. Despite the racial hardships characteristic of all cultures, Silko overcame the lack of acceptance within her own tribe and various ethnic backgrounds to identify with Laguna Pueblo society. The duality of cultures enabled Silko varying experiences essential to her writing. Her connection, and at times separation, of each civilisation influenced a more honest and open portrayal of Native American society to the chagrin of the more traditional factions in Native American society. Perhaps part of that faction is due to how she captures the blending of cultures and then without compunction portrays much of the unexpressed conflict between Laguna and Catholic tradition.

Syncretism and Discontent

In the story, "The Man to Send Rain Clouds", Silko exemplifies Laguna history by writing of an incident she heard from her hometown. The title of this text foregrounds the need for rain, that land requires more than just nature to take its course. "They found him under a cottonwood tree", the narrative begins with 'him', even though there is no antecedent and the mention of the cottonwood places the tree's importance on the landscape juxta-

posing the living tree with the body they had just found. She then describes the western style clothing and how it made it easier to find 'him', "His Levi jacket and pants were faded light blue so that he had been easy to find" (358). At this point in the story, we only know that a man has been found dead wearing faded denim clothing. It is peculiar that the brand, Levi's, is not correctly identified, but instead may reflect idiosyncratic pronunciation by dropping the possessive s. Judging by the names, we do not have enough information to know who these people are, but clues to their identity tie closely to the land and type of vehicle, "Ken drove the truck through the deep sand to the edge of the arroyo". From the truck and arroyo, we can begin to narrow the possibilities as to where such a story could take place, perhaps somewhere among the Pueblos communities in the Southwest United States.

In the second paragraph, more details about the characters unfold as they prepare to bring the corpse home. That fact alone, that they prepare to bring the corpse home, immediately reveals that the characters are not mainstream Americans, nor is this a mainstream setting, but this situation does occur among the Pueblo. Family is an important aspect for the Pueblo people and Eggan suggests that the Lagunas household was an extended maternal family, usually of at least three generations (263). It is immediately noticeable that both Ken and Leon encounter and treat death very differently than mainstream Americans. What follows is an intricate set of rituals that distinctly identify the characters as being Native American,

Before they wrapped the old man, Leon took a piece of string out of his pocket and tied a small grey feather in the old man's long white hair. Ken gave him the paint. Across the brown wrinkled forehead he drew a streak of white, and along the high cheek bones he drew a strip of blue paint. He paused and watched Ken throw pinches of cornmeal and pollen into the wind that fluttered the small grey feather. Then Leon painted with yellow

under the old man's broad nose, and finally, when he had painted green across the chin, he smiled.

"Send us rain clouds, Grandfather". They loaded the bundle in the back of the pick up and covered it with heavy tarp before they started back to the pueblo. (358)

The scene almost looks rehearsed in that when Leon and Ken find the corpse because they have materials in hand necessary to proceed with ancient burial ceremony preparations. It is as if they knew the old man would not be alive and they were ready to prepare the body for burial when they finally found him. Their readiness is an indication of their spirituality which Sando, in writing about the Pueblo Indians, claims, "permeates every aspect of the people's life; it determines man's relation to the natural world and with his fellow man. Its basic concern is a continuity of harmonious relationship with the world in which man lives" (22).

There are two key elements that stand out as they prepare the body, the materials and colours they employ. The grey feather, most likely an eagle feather, is significant for at least two reasons. The first reason is the feather's association with flight, especially with the eagle's ability to fly higher than other birds and thus symbolic of the soul's flight to eternity, and secondly, it contrasts the white hair of the corpse. The mention of the white hair indicates the advanced age of the old man, not just as an older man, but one who has lived a long life and has transformed from black hair to white. The different colours of paint also suggest significance since the white streak across the forehead implies clouds, while the blue streaks down the cheeks indicate rain. The yellow and green streaks are also related as the yellow is symbolic of corn and the green represents the earth, which produces corn. Ken's pitching of cornmeal and pollen are rites of preparation not just in respect for the old man's passing, but for the forthcoming harvest. The face painting serves to prepare the old man for *Iatiku* or

Iyatiku, the Corn Mother to recognise him as her son (Eggen 1999: 267).

The burial preparation under the cottonwood ends with the words, "Send us rain clouds, Grandfather". At first glance the words may seem directed to the spirit of the old man, and that is one possibility. The words serve to plead for rain during the season that tends to be very dry and where the old man's spirit is going, he will have influence on the elements such that he can send rain. It may also be a prayer to the great spirit also known as Grandfather, and thus, the ritual serves to assuage the arid drought that often settles in the southwest from mid-spring to winter. This seemingly endless drought is certainly not advantageous for life among the Pueblo communities, water is crucial and seeking help from supernatural beings and departed family members is appropriate.

It is not until Ken and Leon encounter the young priest that we finally learn the name of the old man because he asks if they found old Teofilo. Their response indicates that they had, but not with language that clearly states that Teofilo is not alive. In another response and rebuke, the priest reveals his concern for Teofilo because of his age and does not want him to stay by himself at the sheep pen anymore. Again, response from Leon has a double entendre, "No, he won't do that any more now". It is true, but the priest thinks Teofilo is alive and they are not going to let him do that anymore, but in reality, Teofilo is dead and cannot do anything anymore. He leaves with another cloaked rebuke about their attendance at Mass and invites them and Teofilo to church on Sunday.

Leon and Ken continue to the house where further preparations for burial will ensue. Though the body is usually buried on the day of one's death, the Pueblo ceremonies continue until the fourth day after death (Bhati 16). It is on this day that the ceremony of songs and feasting take place. Inside the house, a line of meal with food

on it signifies the departure of the spirit, but the meal and food assure that the spirit does not leave hungry. One more ceremony occurs at the grave that involves breaking a bowl of water over the grave, which Tyler suggests is symbolic of the body sprouting again (55), though it may also indicate assurance of the spirit not being thirsty as it departs to join Corn Mother, also known as Mother of All.

This final ceremony is where Leon hears Teofilo's granddaughter's idea to change part of the ceremony. The interchange is not long, drawn out or heated, and begins with Leon asking for clarification,

"What did you say? I didn't hear you".

"I said that I had been thinking about something".

"About what"?

About the priest sprinkling holy water for Grandpa. So he won't be thirsty". (Silko 360).

There is little discussion beyond that, Leon simply and quietly ponders her suggestion for a moment and then responds affirmatively, "I'll see if he's there". It almost certainly is stereotypical that when a woman begins the conversation by mentioning she has been thinking, it usually means that the one she is speaking to is confronted with some task that needs to be done. In this scene, Teresa's thoughts have gotten Leon to agree that the priest should sprinkle holy water on Teofilo before he is buried and so he departs to get the priest.

Leon finds the priest at home and the interaction between the two reveal discomfort on both sides. When asking to perform the duty, Leon words the query very carefully, "I only came to ask you to bring your holy water to the grave yard". The discussion then unfolds that the priest should have been informed of Teofilo's death in order to perform the proper Catholic death rites. But Leon politely explains, "It wasn't necessary, Father". The priest differs, "For a Christian burial it was neces-

sary". It seems they are at an impasse and once again, Leon clarifies, "It's OK father, we just wanted him to have plenty of water" (Silko, 360). It is clear that the ceremony Leon has in mind does not necessarily include the Catholic theological baggage associated with it, just the essential element itself, the holy water. Again, the priest acknowledges that he cannot go against tradition and Leon recognises the standoff and excuses himself, but the priest reticently agrees to help at that very moment.

At the grave, the dimensions of the body wrapped in the blanket confuse the priest because he did not know that Teofilo was so small. But reluctantly and with much difficulty due to the chilly conditions, the priest solemnly sprinkles the water on the body. There is no mention of prayer from him, nor from the family, just silent sprinkles amidst the chilled breeze as the sun sets. As the priest silently returns to the parish, Leon feels good about the ceremony finally finishing. The ritual seemed efficacious to Leon as "he was happy about the sprinkling of the holy water; now the old man could send them big thunderclouds for sure" (Silko 1999:361).

The main focus of the story is the syncretism between the Catholic and Laguna traditions symbolised by the holy water. Despite the blending of the two traditions, the attitude of the principal characters is still in some indefinable way Native American to the reader. These are obviously not imitators or wannabes who bury their Grandfather in the old way because it's New Age and fashionable. The characters truly believe in the old ways, and stand by their beliefs even while officially converted to Catholicism. It is apparent in the priest's paranoia at the gravesite (he feared he was the victim of some practical joke that Teofilo was actually alive and well) that the Native Americans had circumvented the Church and other things besides burials. While performing the sprinkling of holy

water indicates purification in the Catholic tradition, it does not function like this for the Laguna, nor do they want it to. This story manages to illustrate how Native Americans may successfully avoid the classic Bateson double-bind; they have adapted to their new conditions and have adjusted their lifestyle to fit into the modern world, yet they still retain their heritage and sense of identity.

They seemingly expected Teofilo to pass away and when found dead by his family, they are ready for his burial ceremonies. They begin preparing for a traditional burial but Leon deceives the priest, who eventually resents the false information when he states, "Why didn't you tell me he was dead? I could have brought the last rites anyway" (Silko 360). Leon was torn between religious ideas of burial, and in an attempt at compromising with the priest, Leon hopes just to use the holy water customary in Catholicism while sustaining conventional burial methods associated with Leon's tribe. While considering the extent to which the Lagunas have assimilated, the burial reveals they are still very different than mainstream Americans, though their names, Leon, Teofilo, Teresa, Ken, reveal a greater assimilation of identity. Their names indicate an acceptance of Western influence upon one of the key salient factors of identity we have as humans, and that is our names. But in the ceremonial transition to eternity, they are still very Laguna in their worldview.

There are also subtle instances of cultural fusion at play within "The Man to Send Rain Clouds". When Leon paints Teofilo's face as tradition for the dead, he then loads him into a pickup truck driving down a highway. The text shows cultural anxiety surrounding the involvement of other beliefs, specifically religious customs, and relates to the reader a discomfort typical in straddling a cultural and social line. Again, Leon wants a traditional Indian burial for Teofilo, yet when he asks for holy water, the

situation describes the religious and social pressure Native Americans suffer to modernise. Leon supplants the notion of the traditional Catholic use of holy water by insisting on its application so Teofilo posthumously sends rain to the tribe. The story clearly explores the tribal blending of Catholic rituals with traditional Laguna Pueblo customs during a funeral ceremony. The tension of maintaining customary Pueblo practices and the combining of outside influences characterises syncretism and the problems Native Americans face as a result. It is clear that the blending is one-sided, that the Laguna blending is occasioned by the element that would ensure a great harvest but the priest is unaware that his ritual is not being received from the Catholic perspective. From what little we learn about the priest, if he had known, he would not have participated in the ritual.

The focus of Silko's story is seemingly distant, and, depending on the viewpoint, syncretism may establish either a positive or negative perspective as it combines one cultural aspect and assimilates it with another creating a compromise of both ways of life. The alienation between older and younger generations exemplifies the negative meeting the positive point of view. In effect, a facet of new, modern cultural value is gained, but at what price? Some syncretism is psychologically positive because it allows the assimilated civilisation to maintain instances of their original traditions without complete assimilation and loss of culture. With the forced assimilation the American government required of Native Americans, syncretism became a way of upholding their core traditions while succumbing to legislative desire. This concept plays on the idea that, eventually, identity will be lost if compromise cannot be obtained. Those who view syncretism as positive seemingly ignore any indication upon tribal identity and lose either way. Schäfer agrees that, "Although

much of pre-contact culture, traditions, languages, values are lost, Native people are still trying to re-construct a supposedly pure and authentic Native identity" (92). Native American identity, in its whole and at its core, may become endangered because of syncretistic effects.

Conclusion

In North America, thousands of tribes existed separately with their own customs. Expansion of western civilisation forced these tribes to coexist as one civilisation because the American sentiment was that all Native Americans were the same. Forced assimilation began the long and agonising approach to modernisation of the Native American. Just as a character like Leon must confront his own sense of identity, individual Native American tribes must sustain a sense of tribal unity in the face of syncretism. This perpetuity is the conflict Silko presents in "The Man to Send Rainclouds".

Leon cautiously negotiates the cultural and religious line between western society and Catholicism to sustain and defend traditional Native American values. While his effort to obtain the holy water was clearly syncretistic, the blending nevertheless was a compromise of the Laguna tradition burial rites. As in any religious blending, the efficacy of the ritual is not merely a matter of feelings, good or bad, but on the focus of the ritual. If there is no Creator, then the ritual is moot, but if there is a Creator, how can we know whether this attempt to appease, please, or expiate is accepted? From the Judeo-Christian tradition, such a blending is not tolerable, thus, the priest is rightfully reluctant and doubtful about being involved with the burial because the tradition he observes historically rejects such action. But Leon's response and the narrative stance seem to suggest that from Laguna perspective, the syncretistic episode was not problematic, but actually propitiatory.

This simple blended act then fuses the two cultures and the influence is not just on the further rituals, but on the worldview and the notions of individual, self, and community. By acquiescing to any religion or civilisation, Native American traditional identity is compromised at best, lost at worst. But struggle against the inevitable forces of progression and modernity alienates tribes from western society, thus losing benefits established by western democracy, capitalism, and cultural values. The discovery of syncretism and that it occurs, requires sensible and logical explication and perhaps resistance to maintain any salient modern identity in Native American tribes. Syncretism exists, and its effects on Indian culture go far beyond a few stories; through her writing Leslie Marmon Silko takes a bold risk publicising and exposing the phenomenon.

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ПРОЖИМАЊЕ И ИСТИЦАЊЕ У ЧОВЈЕКУ КОЈИ БИ ТРЕБАЛО ДА ДОНЕСЕ КИШУ

Резиме

Рад нуди текстуалну анализу два питања битна за разумијевање домородачког идентитета: прожимање и истицање. У причи *Човјек који би требало да пошаље облаке* Лесли Мармон Силко нуди се значајан увид у утицај који ова два појма имају на начин на који домороци гледају на свијет око себе и на себе саме. Аутори не проучавају само динамику прожимања и ефекте које оно има на истицање и идентитет већ и неочекиване резултате подлијегања таквој пракси. Прича открива да прожимање, иако нуди осјећај постигнућа, напосљетку само умањује и дестабилизује истицање и идентитет домородачке заједнице.

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